

Death Magic 1131

Chapter 1131 Archangel of Death, Azrael [1]

"Seriously?"

"Aapith Nation."

"I don't feel so good."

"Well, you were under quite the troublesome curse," the spells disengaged and her body healed. Take aside the clueless look placed upon Enfia's visage, Staxius took the new occurrences with stride. 'A church serving the adjudicator. Allies are most welcome. She pledged her soul. That is enough for me. I wouldn't get far looking at the situation from a single perspective. I need to build a strong entourage. I digress,' he pinched his temple, 'I remembered something I shouldn't have. The Archangels. If heaven is on the move, I need to fight them. Will they come as the seven archdemons or a representation of the seven virtues? Pit against the princes, I have no idea who'll win. It is said, light always wins over darkness. I'm backed in a corner before anything's set in stone.'

"Lord Igna, you are most powerful," said Enfia, "-please, my lord-"

"Hold it, Memphe," he snuffed the cigarette, "-I need a word with Sathanas. May we have some privacy?"

The attendants left, leaving the room in a daze. The lonesome bulb flickered and swayed the shadows it cast. Sathanas' body healed though her hair and figure were scarred. "-How long has it been?" he flipped a chair and sat, crossing his arms over the backrest, "-Sathanas?"

"Been a while," she pressed her eyes, no amber flickered, her memories were lost, "-I don't know. The last thing I remember was being jailed by my father. No, I was ambushed and then jailed. I don't know what happen then, everything's a blur and I thought about escape... no, I couldn't. They sealed my powers," she opened her palms, "-I can't feel the wrath within my heart..."

'If she's lost her power,' he slowed his breath, '-she'll be useless on the battlefield. I don't need excess weight,' he looked her body over, '-she might be useful if I used the curse of Akina. A worthy vessel to carry the seed of strong demons. I'll need an army, what better way than-' the cold fingers of death caressed his neck, '-I'm being stupid. I can't use her for such a tasteless joke.'

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"If my powers are gone..." her expression said all, "-I can't be of help," she swallowed hard, her fingers trembled as did her knees and shoulders, "-I remember," she cupped her mouth and gagged, "-I remember..." her legs trembled violently, she kicked at nothing, "-LEAVE ME ALONE, LEAVE ME ALONE," her hands were slammed across the table, her legs were spread, she bit her lips and shook her head, nothing seemed to quell her pain, "-HELP ME, AHHHHHHHHHHH," a guttural scream shook the room.

'Plagued by her memories,' he leaned on his elbow and watched, '-her body's reacting to a vivid imagination. She's got no idea there's no one here. To her, the assault's as real as breathing. Her mind's jumbled, I don't need a defective piece in my arsenal,' he stood and peered over her petrified face, "-what you see is nothing, what you feel is nothing, eternal slumber hold peace, you must rest and never

wake," he touched her forehead, "-for the curse of platitude shan't be easily cured. You're scarred, like so many others. You must fight for your place, you must regain the powers thee've lost," he leaned into her ear, "-memories are nothing compared to my ire, Sathanas. Will you defy your contract, will you surrender thy soul?" the mind snapped to reality. '-Cold eyes,' she gulped, '-the coldness in father's eyes. He feels nothing towards me, he doesn't care if I'm scarred or not, I brought the situation on my own, I must atone for my weakness.'

"You must go," he pressed, white lines expanded across her face then throughout her whole body, "-face your fear, face yourself, and more importantly, face me," a bright light flashed – the door opened suddenly to Enfia's worry, "-master?" she interjected, '-Sathanas is gone,' she blinked, '-where did she go?'

"The lass has been sent to purgatory," he smiled, "-I don't need people who're weak," he strode out the room, "-the weak are best kept at arm's length."

Purgatory, the place before the princess was related. A room built on black and white, a strange figure split in half, "-you, my dear, have been chosen as a worthy candidate. Face your fear," the ground split, "-and face yourself, for, in my realm, there are naught but death and destruction."

Crash, a mushroom cloud rose where she landed. 'The jungle?' she sat and coughed, '-where am I?' Alas, to the unknowing Sathanas, the realm she'd been sent to, '-is the world ruled by Orenmir,' passed Staxius's thoughts. '-If she's able to crawl back to reality, she may well have a chance at restoring her foundation. If she fails, her powers will line my sword. Take care of her, Orenmir, dear friend.' The jungle holding her crash landing was but an oasis. The truth, as she climbed a tree for a better look, was a world without color, a world where the screams of the dead were like chirps. Footsteps gathered,"-die... die... die..."

'My trial,' she jumped and raised her arms to the sky, "-ORENMIR, GRANT ME A WEAPON!" a flash of lightning decimated the trees into a smoldering pile of black, "-are you stupid?" echoed from beyond, "-you're not worthy of a weapon. Long as fear plague's thee," the surrounding footsteps, skeletons, merged into a humanoid shape clad in black, "-you shan't escape," it grabbed her arms and pinned her to a bolder.

"Remember me?" the darkness fixed into a familiar face, "-I have come to take what is mine," it threw his hand at her waist and went under her rags, "-you will pay me back."

"NO, NOOOO!" the attacker's shadow completely ravaged her body, she screamed and cried, but no one helped. The enigmatic Orenmir floated with her legs crossed, "-morose sight," she yawned, '-no way this one's going to last. Everyone who comes here is subject to their greatest fear,' she turned and a truly decrepit sight stretched. Similar lands confined in cells, '-the punishment of those I ate are to suffer eternally,'-cruder screams resounded in the distant beyond, '-such is the power granted by my wielder. And to willingly throw his daughter into this cesspit, I must admit, my master is no one to be trifled with,' she looked up, '-use me as you see fit, master, I will take her power if she fails.'

Enfia wandered with Staxius in tow. The basement was rather complex for a cathedral, "-here we are," the narrow walkway opened into a large space with an arched gate. The symbol of Tharis split down the middle, scales spread across the double doors.

"Is this it?"

"Yeah," she nodded, "-I'm afraid it's not-"

"Whatever," he dusted his shoulder and headed straight for the contraption, "-Makina, stop skulking in the shadows and get over here." A beautiful young lass skipped past Enfia, who with a scowl, made nothing of the situation, '-how did she get in here?'

"Look at it, pops."

"I know, looks very impressive. Have a go."

"Oh hell no," she crossed her arms, "-I'm not daft as to be the guinea pig. By all means, Adjudicator, thee should take the handle of the scales. After all, isn't that the whole purpose of your powers, pops?"

"Makina," he paused, "-you have a mouth on you."

"Yeah, it's on my face," she shrugged and was drawn to a shelf and some research papers, "-place's been used recently."

"No use beating around the bush," *Unleash Aura,* power meandered like a thick cloud, "-we best stay outside the chambers," said Makina, "-and we also better raise a barrier," to which she drew symbols and clapped, a transparent wall held rose between them and the chamber.

'I feel the resonance,' he stretched his arms, '-it seems familiar. What resides behind this door might prove useful in what's to com-' an explosion blasted debris and chaos, "-no you don't," raising dust across the room.

"Who might you be?" the dust settled. Light rays fell from the ceiling or what remained of it, "-interloper."

"You survived my attack?" it stepped into the fray; "-I am the Archangel Azrael. I serve the Heavenly Committee, and thus, have been called to stop the Harbinger of Finality. You, Igna Haggard, have been judged as an enemy of existence, as such, as one who represents Death, I shall obey my creed and dispose of thee, Devil.' Azrael's raiment was one common in how scripture described the angel. Fair skin, robes that curled and stopped shy of their waist, long legs, and the power of a golden laurel resting atop the curly long blond hair so familiar to the common folks. Her large white wings were one to not scoff at. The power radiating from each word, each movement, and each step sufficed to take the area by storm. She flapped her blue pupils and readied a golden sword, "-and you are?"

"Archangel Azrael," a mass of darkness gathered at his back, "-you called yourself the angel of death?" he grinned, "-alas, misinformed child, there is but one who wields said title," purple sparks snapped like jolts, "-and you're looking straight at him."

"Nonsense," she brandished her blade, *-I called upon the powers of retribution, I call upon my authority as one who to deliver the dead to their fate. Grant me the authority I was blessed with – the father cares for his child, and the child obeys his patriarch. Thee who've sinned, one faced by the burden of finality, I have come to deliver thy soul from the wretched hand of guilt, Divine-Arts – Repentance* the aura blasted ten-fold – a power so strong quantification seemed naught but a helpless gauge.

“Don’t speak as if I’m dead or need saving,” *Come forth, Orenmir,* the cursed blade manifested, “-we shall see who represents the end.” They vanished into tiny specks of black and gold respectively. They buzzed, and flicked from one end to the other, crashing and striking – the resulting outburst left massive tears and cracks. The fight blasted out of the basement; countless swords hovered beside the Archangel. Staxius was left worst for ware, he gasped, countless cuts dripped blood, “-the power of a demon will never best an angel. Regardless of thy status, Adjudicator, long as I bear the crest of the Father, you shan’t lay a scratch on me. I am one of the seven archangels in service to the heavens. You will have your sentence carried by my hands.”

“Are you done boasting?” the wounds healed, and they hovered a few meters apart, “-don’t you love the smell of the cold air, the sun, and the idyllic landscape at our feet?”

“What are you talking about?” she waved, the golden blades jumped at him, ‘-man, I haven’t had a fight of this caliber in ages,’ Orenmir’s blade vibrated, a deep-crimson hue glowed, ‘-oh, she’s ready for a fight,’ he dodged and dove.

“NO, YOU DON’T!” Azrael gave chase, the swords under her command synced into an arrow shape and darted.

He looked over his shoulder, ‘-she’s fast.’

“Checkmate,” her swords heightened their pace. He dodged by turning to the side, “-YOU’VE LOST!” a portal widened below, ‘-shi-’ a golden lance dug into his side and out the other, crushing the inner organs like one crumbling a piece of paper. He dropped out of the skies, crash-landing in such a way as to lose half of his torso. An empty expression, blood flowed, “-Azrael, we did it.”

“You sure are powerful for someone who serves under Artanos. Tell me, little girl, where did you learn to wield the power of the Gei Lance?”

“Don’t know,” she giggled, “-father said to shove this into people I don’t like.”

“One way to put it,” they looked over the dead body, “-he’s not returning after a hit from a divine weapon. I fear, the man’s gone.”

“Is that bad, big sister Azrael?”

“No, we just did our job.”

Makina and Enfia watched his last moment hopelessly, “-Enfia, did you betray us?”

“MASTER!”

Chapter 1132 Archangel of Death, Azrael [2]

‘They caught me off guard. I can’t feel my lower half. What a shame, I should have guarded my blind spot. Such a dumb mistake. Confirms my assumptions. I called and there’s the archangel of Death, Azrael. I don’t know why they gave her the title of Death. She helps souls to the afterlife, nothing more. Death in itself is the slaughter of those who have passed their time, or rather, whatever I want it to be. The Gei Lance was used. A remnant of the war, a crafted artifact that can be said to be an ancient gift. The power it uses is one closely related to the curse of Epok, related to the destruction and assimilation. It settles it,’ two shadows lowered onto where he lay – a little girl and the archangel. The former

wielded the lance, twice over her body, and the archangel, Azrael, kept an unchanging expression. Blood gathered underneath his body. The girl landed and slid down the crater, followed by the same screeching sound of the archangel,

"He's dead?"

"I think he is," Azrael leaned, "-I sure hope he is."

"Why, are you scared?"

"Obviously," she focused on the little girl, "-you're youthful and don't know the first thing about this man's legacy. I know all about his adventures, this man who so wrongly attained the powers of a Watcher."

"Not that scary to me," the girl shrugged, "-father said not to worry. He said this man is weak, and if push comes to shove, father would send reinforcement."

"The youth have no respect," she summoned a dagger, "-move back, I'll finalize his last rites."

'He twitched,' Azrael pulled and raised her guard, "-bring out the weapon."

"For a dead guy?"

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"My word," he flipped and pushed himself upright, "-I swear, killing is much more enjoyable than being killed."

"-GET BA-"

"No use," he gestured and made a circle, "-you should expect the unexpected, so I say, actions are much unpredictable for one to follow. I mean, look here, you, little one, masterfully delivered a fatal blow if it had been anyone else," no regeneration, nothing, he stood with half of the torso gone, "-must be a gruesome sight," he looked down, "-very unfortunate," *snap,* a bright green light flickered, the lost body parts returned, "-as for you, archangel and the little one of service to Artanos," he shook his hands and clapped, "-shall we have a round two?"

CRACK, the barrier shattered, "-no matter what you say, Devil, I will always outclass the inherent darkness within thy soul."

"Broke from the barrier?" he smiled; "-I see the fight has yet begun." The duo shot into the skies with Staxius firm on the ground, '-giving lucifer's wings to Teresa's lowered my mobility in the air. I'd love to fight there... hovering is just too much work to be bothered with. I'll suppose I ought to use my lovely wife's blood.'

"Stand back, little one. You don't have the experience to fight him head-on. I'll fight in your stead. Keep those two company, I rather not have interruptions when fighting at full power," they separated, each choosing their fights. The little one landed before Makina and Enfia, who, crossing one another's gaze, returned and simply crossed their arms, "-we're not going to fight."

“Good,” said the little one, “-I’m too hungry to fight. I will stay until my father calls. Can you guys give me something to eat?”

“Makina, what are you doing?” Enfia interjected and grabbed the angel’s arm.

Makina pulled her shoulders from Enfia’s grip, “-going to get some food for the little one. Want something?”

“How are you taking this so-”

“So nonchalantly?” she narrowed, “-trust.”

‘Trust...’ Enfia turned her gaze at the two imminent pressures. Golden lights embellished the angel of death’s wings. Divine radiance was one to behold. Dignified beauty, there was nothing to be said, ‘-I must trust in the master.’

Meanwhile, on the battlefield. Heavy clouds gathered, “-tell me, Azrael, why are you here?”

“I said it before,” she rolled her eyes, “-to end your life.”

“Then answer me this, archangel of Death. Bearer of the Death title, do you understand the real meaning behind what it is to be Death?”

“Obviously,” she knitted her brows, “-to aid the deceased into the afterlife. Such is my purpose. We keep the order between life and death. You mean to tell me there is more?”

“No,” he returned, “-it is a simple question with many answers. I’m beholder of Death, I am the heir to my master, or rather, was. I wish I was able to inherit his power and be called a God of Death. I, for reasons I shan’t elaborate upon, can’t follow my destiny as his heir. Instead, I am forced to make my own path, to set an example for my own. Death is representative of what a person wants. Salvation, the ultimate ecstasy, a passing fancy, or an accident – it takes many forces, the omnipotent word, Death.”

“Are we going to fight?” she gathered her swords, “-or aren’t we?”

“If it’s a fight you want,” a strange symbol emerged on his forehead. Golden threads spread throughout his face – each pulse shook the air.

‘He’s gaining power, what is he?’

“Azrael, quick question,” he glared with beaming golden pupils, “-were you fighting at full strength?”

“No,” she shrugged, “-limited powers, you know how it goes.”

“I see,” the shoulder slumped, “-I was a fool to get my hopes up. Instead, I will show you the proper way on how Death is enacted.”

“Boring,” she flapped and caught Staxius off-guard, her sword pierced straight through his heart. He dropped out of the sky but landed on his knees – the explosion blew dust and debris throughout the area, “-I won’t make the same mistake,” her murderous gaze reappeared behind with her sword headed for his neck. He staggered forward, narrowly escaping her hand-held blade but, alas, was impaled by ten others.

"I have the advantage of close and long range. You won't stop me, Devil. Such is the curse of your kin – the divine shall always prosper. Thou art but fools singing the whispers of falsehood."

"Don't get cocky," he pulled out the blades one by one, "-we're immune to death," and stepped forward, dipped under her guard, and cleanly pierced her back, impaling her heart in the process. She staggered forward and got some distance.

"What is the point of fighting if neither of us is going to die?"

"There is a method to my madness," he laughed, "-Azrael," the aura deadened, "-don't let your guard down," he jumped and drew Orenmir, the movements hastened, the sidesteps and clever evades overwhelmed the archangel. No matter how much she gathered her swords into barriers and send them as a projectile, there were but misses. It reached a point where her swordsmanship failed, '-he's copying all my moves,' she sidestepped, '-and instantly counters. He lured me on firm ground where he has a clear advantage. I'm not suited for this type of combat,' sweat rolled down her forehead, they stood at a standstill, each gauging the other's slight movement, '-the moment I turn my back or remotely think about getting air, he'll strike. We're fast, we can cover the distance in a flash. I was right not to underestimate him... well, if he's the intent of fighting till one yields, I best return the sentiment. *Oh god of the Sword, one to whomst I pledge my blade. Heed my call, heed my voice – channel the powers of the ancients, gather forth, souls of the fallen, souls of the defeated. Be heard once more, be heard by the living, follow my voice, follow my soul; Divine-arts – Transference,* a pulse of energy swallowed the very ground, *-Order, release the binds of mercy, release the binds of sympathy. Gather at my wings, the wind of change, for I am she who travels across worlds, one who delivers the fallen to their destination – I am the Archangel of Death. Revoke Binds; Holia Morts,*

Pressure, "-so this is the power of an archangel," Makina said with hands full of fruits, "-they don't mess around. Her powers are on level to some lower-tier gods I have met. She's strong, very strong. Enfia," she shouted, "-where are you?"

"Over here," the bushes shook, "-I went to get something at the cathedral. How's the fight looking?"

"Devil's about to lose," said the little one, "-Azrael's released her real powers. This world is at risk of collapse if she continues to pull mana at the rate she's going."

As she said, tears and splits in reality -barely noticeable to the untrained eye, began to splinter.

The multitude of swords at her call merged into a harp. She sat with her wings stretched over the strings, "-for the safety of the world, I will destroy you, Devil," a complete change in her appearance. Her skin glowed with power, white lines went across her arms and legs – each string plucked sent waves of pure power. One hit and *crack,* instant destruction.

Staxius held his ground, '-yeah, not going to fall into her tunes. I know that harp. The ultimate weapon when facing an army. The faster one plays, the more melodies are used, and the stronger the pulses and fiercer the attacks. The swords were her strings-turned blades. She's full of surprises.'

"Don't think I'm going to wait," she strummed – a volley of dense mana shot and landed into countless pockets of void. He dodged, "-too bad," she played another melody – the color swapped for one light blue, this time hitting his feet and hand, "-the more you run, the easier the job," she hovered, the place of impact vanished, and he fell.

‘Man, I’m making a fool of myself,’ he sat and laughed – notes rained, ‘-she hit my foot, and it’s gone, my hand, it’s gone too. What a pain in the ass.’

I call upon the divine horns to roar. Resonate across the worlds and make thy intent heart – call of the blessed: Egria he suddenly closed his gestures, ‘-I can’t move... she’s overwhelming my pressure. The divine is hiding terrifying powers. I’m done playing around. I suppose it’s time to make my move.’

She hovered over with her wings plucking the melody, “-are you honestly this weak? I’ve unleashed my true powers and have shown my hand. You don’t feel the need to at least make the fight worth my while? I get that death doesn’t affect either of us, still, I thought we’d be able to put the matter to rest.”

“Don’t boast just yet,” he brandished a sinister smile, *Deep slumber, deep rest, awaken for the chance at retribution. Gate of which stands before mine way, open for thy master has come: Nevermore – Hell’s Gate.* the air thickened, and she immediately took her distance, *Span across the ages, fear is what held peace, fear is what caused War, fear is the root of evil. I, the harbinger of the ultimate fear, have come to spread and reclaim what is mine of right: Nevermore – Terror Gate.* the energy altered form, the mana in the atmosphere split into negative emotions, *Unbound by the laws of Heaven to Hell; unshackle mine power: Nevermore – Annihilation Gate.*

O’ goddess forgotten by the ages, o’ goddess who spread victory and peace over the souls of true warriors. I, humble vessel for thy Symbol, plea to have a sliver of thy strength, Nike’s arms slowly ripped the binds of Egria, “-to the foolish archangel, such is the power bestowed,” the energy pulsed, ‘-this is amazing,’ he smirked, ‘-I haven’t felt this way for so long. The death element beats, my deaths have doubled my strength as well as my domain. It is true, I have become one with the Shadow Realm. We’re tied by the shared Death Element. This is the start of a new quest,’ he opened his palm towards Azrael, *-by the Adjudicator’s will, I order thy power’s restraint,* he closed his palm, *-seal.* she dropped, ‘-no one’s going to stand in my way,’ he moved, she landed on Orenmir, smearing blood across Staxius’ face, “-Death comes for all.”

Chapter 1133 Heavenly Virtues

Blood upon Staxius’ face. It seemed right. Without any way to describe why or how – the sight of his sharpened jaw, ponderous eyes, and symbols of the ancient ones – it felt right. Azrael’s blood gushed, lining Orenmir and eventually his hands and arms. He dropped his elbow, and the archangel slammed harshly, almost to the point of hearing bone crack. “-Death comes for all,” he rolled her face with his feet, “-and you, archangel of death, will be one to experience the event first hand,” power gathered in his stance. Lightning struck the somber landscape – whispers of the deceases blended with the wind’s howl – Staxius’ heartbeat echoed like drums, and each thud pulsed a gentle shimmer across the golden lines over his body.

“Not on my watch,” a neigh followed by a heavy crash, “-damned fool,” a lady in armor rode upon a headless mount, “-you will not slay an archangel so easily,” the dame had the wounded over her shoulder, “-consider this battle yours, Igna Haggard.”

“If it’s not Undrar,” he clapped, and the surrounding vanished into pure white. She saw the world disappear, her horse, the wounded, the ground, everything faded. A simple pair of footsteps clopped, “-the harbinger of Death. Why allow an archangel to trump over the work lord Death has bestowed upon our names?”

"I won't hear much from your mouth, traitor. You betrayed our master's trust. Then again," she stood and watched, there was only air in-between him and her, "-you were never the one I swore friendship towards. He's long gone, that foolish boy I admired and enjoyed the company of."

"Ah yes," he returned her reminiscing, "-Viola, poor ol' friend he so willingly abandoned."

"He would never leave a friend."

"Sorry to burst your ignorance," he closed the distance, the pupils turned red and white, "-I would leave a friend if they served their purpose. Igna's one to take the camaraderie and building a stable entourage to heart. What did it bring in the end, by caring for you, the generals, and many more allies, he found himself in a corner, locked without the strength to advance. He was strong, he could have fought if push came to shove, and that incarnation was an idealist at his core. The representation of what I was never able to show or do. Tell my children I loved them, tell my friends I miss them. Little things we take for granted. The joy it brought was temporary – he lost everything in the end, the sight of Sathanas, it was enough to shake a man's soul. You joined the Heavenly council; I will not question your intent or say otherwise. My only purpose is to bring my will into reality. The balance will be restored. I will become the devil to change the world, for only a monster knows how a monster thinks. I know best," he spun and waved, "-until we meet again," the whiteness regained color. A jolt dropped her jaw, an electric shock from her memories, '-that wave,' she blinked as reality blurred,

"-cast the teleportation," said distant cries, "-she has the archangel, we're returning home."

Like that, Igna's shadow disappeared – the forest swapped for a gilded hall and marble decadence, "-you've done an amazing job like always," said a suave accent, "-just like he predicted."

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"Lixbin," she exhaled and snapped, the steed puffed. Azrael ate the ground, chipping a tooth and bleeding from her chest, "-take her to the goddess of restoration. If you don't act quickly, she'll die."

"Pfft," said a passing deity, "-no way this girl's going to die. She's the representation of Death. Please get your information straight," they clicked their tongues to the admiration of yes men and women, "-distasteful presence such as yours-

"I calmly ask for you to excuse us from our presence."

Lixbin's coldness, "-I have more pressing matters to attend. Pardon me," the deity and their entourage meandered. The god of Darkness' fear horned Undrar.

"Can she really die?"

"We all can," she exhaled, "-remember, he's the Adjudicator, there's nothing impossible to the man, nothing save the limits of his imagination. Will you take her or shall I carry the lass myself?"

"No, no, I will handle it from here." Maids beckoned to his side with a raise of the hand, '-a weird curse. She spoke with reason. Azrael is an archangel, with her resistance she'll easily fight the malady,' to them, the attack was but a failed assault. To Undrar, as she walked from the flying palace to one of the remote islands used as gardens – the horizon and world ahead stretched beyond her wildest dreams, '-I've been focused on simple matters I didn't take time to breathe fresh air and look at my surrounding.

That wave and how he spoke. He's the only person able to give clues whilst remaining utterly clueless. A master of the art of manipulation, the one I once called a friend. It's him, it is him. the wave, it's him,' memories of their shared past rushed and burst out in form of tears. I'm conflicted... how should I approach the situation-'

High heels and lavishing clothing paused a fountain in honor of Zeus, "-Undrar?"

"Gophy," the harbinger returned her condescending leer, "-rare to see the lady of lord Artanos out and about. What brings you to the ground of the peasants?"

She gestured her posse, most of whom were handsome young men, who, without hesitation, threw dagger-like glares at Undrar, to leave. They did so with a healthy amount of arguing, though, through what Undrar saw, '-complaining idiots,' left much to be desired. Artanos' mistress gracefully climbed the stairs to where Undrar waited, "-I do beg your pardon, lady Undrar."

"No offense taken."

"You brim with a new energy, did something happen?"

"Why must you ask such personal questions?"

"Happiness is best shared, is it not?"

"I suppose you're right," they turned at the city below, "-question, Gophy, if you were Staxius and I happened to ask the importance of allies, how would you respond?"

"strange," she scanned Undrar's expression, "-I guess I'll entertain the idea," she crossed her arms in a toothache pose and thought, '-if I were in his shoe. I'd leave those who don't matter?'

"You reached an answer," Undrar gave a soft grin, "-to leave those who do not matter, yeah?"

"My, consider me impressed. How did you know?"

"Staxius' inherent nature is something to be praised."

"What about you, do you know the answer?"

"Yes, and I heard so from a man who knows him well. To Staxius, those who leave with his secrets are threats, taints on his prestige image. Igna, on the other hand, was one to surround himself with trustworthy people, like you and me. We are trustworthy – the inability to act was the turning point for our siding with the opposition. For me anyway, you chose romance above everything else. Not saying it's wrong but you were careless."

"Where is this going?"

"To those who have betrayed the Devil's trust. He will return to collect and return he shall. I advise keeping a closer entourage made of people who can be trusted."

"Why, it's not like Igna's going to come barging in."

"He won't," she turned and mimicked Staxius' wave, "-but I know someone who might."

At that moment, Gophy's heart of glass shattered, 'she waved like he used to. Her words weren't without meaning. It's her way of telling me Staxius's reawakened. I don't believe it-'

"Lady Gophy, lady Gophy, please, we need your assistance," cried smaller sized angel of beastlike features.

They hurried past the decoration and prestige, "-you're here," Lixbin breathed a sigh of relief. The large bedroom held quite the entourage of high-ranking individuals – archangel to the heavenly convention, "-Gophy, are you alright?"

"I'm fine," she held Artanos' hand and walked to the bed, "-what happened to her?"

"I can't make heads or tails about this curse," Artanos crossed his arms, "-no one here has any idea of what's wrong with Azrael. Even the Goddess of Restoration can't heal the wounds. We thought you'd be of help since, you know."

'Know that I was a confidant in service of the Adjudicator, I know,' she shuffled to the bedside, '-no need to give me the side glances. I know you don't like my presence, especially you, Zeus. To see me with Artanos even when you were certain to making me thy wife,' a single look sufficed, '-this curse is-' she gulped, '-a slow acting aging. Azrael's curse is not deadly, it's slow never-ending suffering. The writings have the essence of... wait, is that Undrar's symbol?' she took a step back, '-that symbol can't be real. It's only there for one person's usage, only one. Staxius.'

"Gophy, tell us."

"An ancient curse," she gathered her words from a confusing situation, "-I can't say more. She's not going to die. It's a curse of eternal suffering. Azrael, I'm afraid, won't be able to use her powers anymore. She'll most likely be bedridden for the rest of eternity, however long that lasts."

"Azrael," clasped hands held the wounded, "-my sister, please do not fret. We will do what is must to restore your body," the patron saint of animals and nature pressed her forehead lightly against Azrael's palm, "-my sister, please do not worry. I will do what I must."

"Ariel," came a harsher voice, "-you know very well we don't have the ability to make such a promise. Especially not since our brother has been lost to the ages."

"Michael, don't bring matters of foreign provenance to our current plight."

"Dear sister Ariel, you were the optimist... without our brothers, your pride in nature and peace would have never passed."

"Enough, Michael," said a soft-spoken young man, "-no more backtalk to your kin."

"But brother Chamuel..."

"No more brother."

Clap, clap, "-no more arguments. Archangels, please vacate the premises. You have duties you must attend to. I will dig deeper into Azrael's situation."

"You better come up with results," Michael thundered, "-for our support in battle will only come once you've proven your worth, God of Wisdom." The archangel took their presence and lightened the room, leaving Zeus, Artanos, Lixbin, and Gophy, seeing the others follow the angel's example.

"Nothing can be done about her?" Zeus turned to Gophy.

"She can be restored. Not saying anything about the goddess of Restoration's powers – I'm sure the archangel of restoration will be more in tune with one of his own. It is easier to heal a family member than a stranger, given the complexity of the curse."

"Raphael is not to be found," Artanos sighed, "-I've petitioned the seven arch angels for the longest time. Like Igna, we must gather the holders of the seven heavenly virtues.

Most likely than not, those holders are tied to the archangels. It is hard to gauge who is who..."

"Such a task proven difficult to Artanos is one I shan't get myself into. Do what is needed, my resources are at your beckon call, Artanos. We're on the same team and seek only to establish our reality to flourish. In the end, there are things we gods are unaware of. Keep me updated," he purposefully held his gaze on Gophy, "-don't hide the truth," he voiced silently.

Deep cracks in the earth's core, heavy tremors. The gates under the cathedral screeched. Makina and Enfia held hands. Staxius clawed the impasses – a sharp light emanated within. A piece of the soil holding a plant carelessly fell before the gateway. Light from inside touched the plant and instantly vaporized. Curiously enough, the light barely made a dent in Staxius, "-want to come?" he mischievously asked over the shoulder. They shook their heads in sync and stood far back as humanly possible.

A shiver went down his spine, '-this feeling of nostalgia. Deja-vue. I know this place; I know what it does... the light is the sign of the end. The one I ought to seek is the lawmaker,' he raised his hands, '-heed my voice, powers of the Adjudicator, I have returned.'

Chapter 1134 The Adjudicator's Truth

"Indeed you have," the room snapped shut, and a massive gust of energy spat, eating everything in its path. When it came to energy beyond the comprehension of humans, there were and yet are questions to be answered, "-Adjudicator," echoed the power gathered at Staxius' fist. The whiteness of the room dulled as he absorbed, "-complete," he gasped and relaxed his arms. A familiar world stretched, '-Oriantia,' he mumbled, '-the mushroom tower and the nearby settlements. The land below the edifice amassed unusual buildings, and village-like features for a world without life. 'Origin must have created life,' he looked away, instead choosing to focus upon a path headed up a particular mountain. The trees hung over the trail. Whispers and hums murmured. '-The detection spell is inactive,' he tried to no avail, '-can't use mana or magic,' he pressed on. Nature slowly built into fragments of the past. Broken walls and bricks scattered, all headed up, up to an abandoned tower. Ancient symbols were carved above the heavy doors. Moss and veins took the liberty of growth. Flora had reclaimed her territory. Foliage from the forest spread yet – covering the whole of the tower, hiding its existence. A soft-spoken whisper, '-come,' it said, "-come."

'The power I absorbed... it's memories of my past,' he passed the entrance and walked straight through the boulders covering the entrance. 'The time before this realm,' stairs immediately spiraled downward, '-the story of my previous incarnation as the end of Ashna,' a room widened with relics of the past. A

locked room kept from the passage of reality, stuck in place without change. It is built like a study crossed with a library. Bookshelves prominently stretched to the unlikely tall ceiling. A piano at the center, a fireplace at the wall, and more doors headed into other rooms. Staxius walked past the fireplace, the latter ignited automatically. The piano plucked soft notes, and the atmosphere felt cozy and warm. ‘Take a seat,’ said the voice,’ he ignored the order and unlocked one of the bigger doors, ‘there it is,’ he stepped inside the treasury, “the relics of my past accomplishments.”

A guardian, a humanoid figure of purple skin, blue eyes, and a golden halo, stood with arms cupped at its waist and visage hidden by the white and golden raiment of the religious outfit. The robe looked from another time – large with multiple stones, “welcome back, my master,” it said with a usually soft voice.

“I’d say it’s a pleasure,” he moved forth to a display case, “but, I haven’t assimilated my memories yet.”

The purple figure glanced, and with a flick, had a dagger pressed at the back of Staxius’ neck, “not so fast,” he replied, grabbing the thin wrist and wrapping it around the attacker’s back, “drop the dagger,” he pressed, almost to the point of snapping – the metal clanged, “why did you attack?”

“Because,” the hood slipped and revealed a half-angel/half-demon, her facial structure was one related to the archangels, with sharp jaws and leering eyes, her halo hovered above horns of blatant demonic origin. Her fingers were discolored, part pale part purple, reason for the long vestment was to hide the bicolored features, “you forgot...”

“Don’t be rash,” he eased the grip and tapped her head, “you stupid child. Have you grown impolite over the years?”

“A person changes over time,” she narrowed, “and you, my master, are not the same as before.”

“Touche,” he nodded, “we agree we’re not who we remember?”

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“Yeah,” she spun towards another room, “please take a seat as I prepare the room. Touch up on the library, they should contain your memories from Ashna. I’ll be a minute.”

‘Weird girl,’ he returned whence the piano sang, ‘look at all these books,’ he turned and turned, the endless display continued, ‘bind beautifully and set so lovingly. I do wonder why it gets me so nostalgic. I had flash images of her – her wrapped in a cloth and abandoned at my doorstep. He fell on a seat and lit a cigarette.

‘Ashna, the reality before the current reality. I was awakened by the effort of pseudo-humans, they had built cities made of metal – shining and idyllic. An advanced society must be in the way of technological advancement. I didn’t know it then but I know now from reference, they are way advanced. Having conquered space, itself – the race named itself Foda. Unlike here, they were the single race ruling over their planets. The landscape as I remember is of tall skyscrapers touching the lovely colored sky –vast, taking utmost care of the planet, allowing nature to roam freely. They prayed to the earth and respected her wishes. They learned to harness the powers of the sun, and in a way, I can say they were very advance. All the research in the world couldn’t have prepared their minds for what was ahead.’

‘Travelling the universe is a concept most human minds can’t comprehend. The biological restriction placed on imagining such distances lessens the scale. Foda’s took their first journey centuries back,

claiming the moon and their solar system as territory. Such action was normal, alas, to their dismay – the opening of the universe meant the sheer reality of their action would cost in the long run. By announcing their ability to expand – a guardian-like race, the peacekeepers – known also by said title, invaded their system and declared a warning. Any further expansion would result in war against the people of Foda. To them, the announcement was but the confirmation of the long-assumed truth of life beyond. A species looking to speak to another – a prospect which had the thinks salivate. I confess I had set the time lime so that life would evolve in many galaxies with distance as their separation. Having done so, I returned to my slumber. Then I found myself reawakened by the people of Foda.’

‘By the time first contact was made, centuries passed and their technology outgrew the potential of the sun. They made allies throughout the universe – planets were akin to countries, and the world map, if replaced by the map of the galaxy, was like kingdoms each ruling their region. Fodaian life was very much peaceful and scholarly in nature. They baffled the greater minds of other planets, affectionately being dubbed the Thinkers. Warmonger – the real threat to the peace built by the federation of planets, struck. They hit hard and quickly – destroying entire planets as if shooting cans. It echoed from one side of the universe, and thus, the Mongers hastily subjugated their realm of influence. Foda and the allies’ planets banded under a single banner – and so, the thousand war between the Federation and Empire began. War waged in space wasn’t glamorous. Death came easily – blackholes used to swallow the death, being treated like nothing but trashcans. The purity of the universe was being sullied, and one after the other, those under the banner of the Federation began to die out. Thinkers, the Fodas, were called to court for their opinion, and so, came to a single answer – the end. With their technology, it would be easy to grant immortality of the mind as opposed to the flesh. And many signed on to the idea – a peace treaty was drafted to halt the coming war until news of the Federation’s defeat struck home. They were wiped by a single entity – one to be known as God. We throw the title around like nothing nowadays. Back in Ashna, when God and Demons were nothing save romance novels – the usage of the title God, meant and held its weight. He singlehandedly exterminated the greatest threat to Universe. They applauded the truth, but alas, the reality was as survivors recalled, “-God has come to destroy and build anew, a realm where he reigns as supreme leader,” direct challenge to the will of the universe, and in a way, a direct challenge to me, who had created Ashna with my lifeforce. God came into existence with the power of belief. A forgotten race, set in a distant galaxy – the closest relatives to humans, set about thinking they were the center of the universe. Their power was the bring into reality what they believed. God, was their unwilling creation.’

‘Death and destruction followed God’s path. The Federation ran to the safety of Foda, who, by that time, was a supreme leader amidst the races. Peace talks with the newer race ended in tragedy. Peaceful envoys were captured and tortured for their sickly curiosity. It became clear what sort of people they were. Fanatics.’

‘With nothing to go from, Foda set about creating a machine that’d know the answer of all. Despite their advancement, the machine could answer a single question, and there, inquired about the start and end of their reality. They came across my name, the Adjudicator, an entity strong enough to face God. The symbols of Death, Time, and Creation gathered, the Three in One became whole, I was awakened.’

‘They treated me with respect and asked but a simple request.’

“What would you have me do?”

“We would like for you to ensure the survival of our races. We would like for you to move the age of Ashna into a realm of greater success. We would request for all our races to exist on a single planet and for the worlds to be separated with multiple dimensions, multiverse. In summary, we would like for you, Adjudicator, to lead our people to salvation, and eventual finality.”

‘A simple request, I led their forces for thousands of years, gaining my strength and fighting God’s legion. Many occurrences happened, and I lived a great life despite Ashna’s desperation and devastation. It grew into a wasteland, a desert deprived of life and hope. The race who’d be the root cause of God’s birth was known as Divines – they controlled God and knew of their potential. The greed of these people was so vicious it took the lives of fellow countrymen. The Thinkers, known for their purple skin bravely took their weapons against Divines, known by the halo. It was by that time I met her, the girl who’d eventually become my champion.’

‘Thinkers and Divines knew each other, they were rivals. The people themselves didn’t care about who won and who lost... sadly, it was too late for peace. The song of destruction had come in form of the implosion of the Divine’s star. No energy source meant certain death; they came for Foda’s energy. And there, I was forced to resolve the battle with God. Our differences were stark, he was strong, able to create matter from naught. I was stronger since the world itself was my domain. I killed God and rendered the Divines helpless, drowning in their own blood. Alas, when I raised my head to face my allies, I saw no one. I had killed everything in the process – rendered the universe a graveyard. My reawakening is the symbol of the End. With what power I had, I swallowed Ashna and restarted reality as it’s known now, scattering my symbol to greaten the change of survival.’

He flicked the cigarette, ‘-and so, I was reincarnated as Alfred by the meddling of my guardian. I loved living in Ashna, it tore me apart when I looked at everything being destroyed by my hand,’ he exhaled, a single tear rolled down his cheek, ‘-and I should have been dead, they kept me alive. I kept my promise and thus, the world of today.’

“Did you remember?”

“Yeah. What about you, why are you here?”

“To serve my father,” she bowed, “-the realm of ours is locked beyond the confines of Reality. We’re in a pocket of our own making. A haven, a place for you to judge as you had in the past.”

“Tell me, why lock away the memories?”

“Memories bring power, and with power comes fear. It was a decision I made to lock away the truth for when the time comes when you would subconsciously seek my aid. I thought I was secretive, turns out God survived and has rebuilt his kingdom of Divines. We know not what form he has taken or what he plans to do, one thing is certain, he’ll come for revenge.”

Chapter 1135 Solo Adventure

Quite some time elapsed after the discovery of the secret room. By then, the guardian who’d come to be known as Fae would also enroll at Lucifer’s academy as a member of his household. The power of memories had brought Staxius to his feet. As such, he spent his time inside the workshop.

'I need a breath of fresh air,' he pulled drafters, fresh crisp air blew across his face, '-my god,' he inhaled deeply, '-feels longer than I had imagined. I should check up on my students. The weekend is over, better get to work I suppose,' a makeshift bedroom was installed shy of the crafting stations. He threw on his working outfit and headed for the academy.

'The day is as lovely for them as it is for us. Students flying to school, the town headed to work, and so on. The hour of transit is something I long to see,' he walked with a short grip on a leather briefcase, '-they live without consequences. Mending to the will of those at the summit,' an urgent summons remained at the workshop to the mercy of the draft, '-to the Devil, we ask for thy assistance,' signed, Graso. Instead of taking the main entrance, placed to the south of the academy, he chose the northeast. Advertisements of another battle brought a vibrant air to the atmosphere. Money, gambling, and the vices of greed. The scent of victory and defeat hung. He stepped off a patch of grass onto one of stone and gravel – the walkway circled the eastern wing, one where General Studies remained. The replaced desert – lovely flora and fauna, was quite the attraction. Plants of unknown origin flourished – foliage filled with yellow petals hang over the walkway and some had fallen – yellow and yellow, a harmony between trees and trail.

Distant figures of a line caught his attention, '-clientele,' he narrowed and continued the promenade. A line stretched a few meters out of the building. Going by uniforms, most of the guests were from the Academic department. '-Skeptor must loath the popularity,' he skipped the line and entered, "-please wait a moment," said a distressed waitress, "-we'll have your meal readied."

"Please see that you do," said a very condescending tone. Staxius horned onto said individual and approached their table, "-to see the vice-director enjoying the meals made by my students, it's truly an honor."

"Lord Igna-" he choked, or so it seemed, quickly hiding his mouth and wiping his face, "-I thought you were on medical leave. Is it okay for you to be walking around?"

"A teacher can't help but feel anxious when he doesn't show up for a while. I had to check on my students, especially my children, the prince, and the princesses. You know how they can get," he gave a simple smile, "-I see we've gotten an increase in customers. I'll see what I can do," he walked past. Those seated were in awe.

"Look at him, he's so handsome."

"I know, nothing like our professor."

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"I envy the girls of 3-2, they get to enjoy him teaching class. I'd stare at him all day if I could."

With a waterfall of compliments, he simply nodded and cut into the kitchen. A busy Makina and sweaty Fae were at work. The rest of Class 3-2 were also out and about, helping with customers and behind the scene.

"I'M TIRED!" cried a slumped Makina, "-I'm the Sword Maiden of Ehua, a legendary figure made for battle, not this..."

“Well, it does help we get paid,” came the comment of a student, “-Teach was nice to give up a raise for our work in the morning and afternoon. It’s good working experience.”

“Dealing with customer’s harder than you think,” came another waiter, “-even if they’re classmates, they do hold back when ordering. I’m finished...”

“Too much work and not enough staff,” sighed Lilia, “-where’s Arde, tell him to organize outside seating arrangements.”

Staxius cut into the fold and clapped, “-I see you’re working hard,” he smiled, and the students breathed a sigh of relief, “-teacher, welcome back.”

“You need some assistance, don’t you,” he unbuttoned his shirt, threw the briefcase over a lonesome table, grabbed a stray cloth, and tied his hair, “-leave the cooking to us. Lilia, take this,” he flicked a small cube, “-there should be a symbol along the trail, place that cube there and clap three times whilst reciting the incarnated written here. It’ll add an extension for the café. Chop chop people, we don’t have time to waste,” he jokingly bumped hip against Makina, “-show us your legendary swordsmanship,” he sarcastically held a kitchen knife in both hands, “-may your blade guide us to a succulent victory,” taking the jest aside, he scanned and noticed considerable fatigue, ‘-overworked,’ he pressed his palms, *Mantia – Book of Restoration, Honzela, eight passage, fatigue begets worry, worry begets trouble. Fatigue is the mother of all mistakes, fatigue is the harbinger of procrastination. Set aside the troubles of the present and dig into the future, such is the path to atonement, and such is the path to vigor. Close thine eyes and breath, for night, has set and morning rises – be rejuvenated, Repos,* a kind warm light lit the workers. Energy brimmed, the shot in power had the room trembling under the weight of their stomps.

“What did you do?” Makina inquired.

“A simple restoration spell. Everyone’s drained. I assume from the preparation of the student council election. It’s hard work, especially for those in General studies. What about you, Makina, how do you enjoy school so far,” they worked in tandem, his gestures were swift and graceful. The skills learned in the venture as a chef came in handy, a gentleman must know his way around a kitchen as he does around a dancefloor, a quote from a rather obscure piece of writing he read on bored nights.

“It’s fun, I think,” she shrugged, “-the students give me quite a lot of attention. I can’t help it,” he tapped her shoulder, wing sprouted, “-they love how my wings look.”

“Stop showing off,” he tapped her head and looked towards Fae, “-what about you?”

“I don’t know,’ she shrugged, “-I spent most my time napping with Vanesa.”

“speaking of her, where is she?”

“With Asmodeus and Mammon. They’re getting ready for the battle. Many have bet on today’s match.”

“I see.”

Meanwhile outside, ‘-I wonder how the extension’s going to look,’ she set the cube and recited the incantation. Bystanders were curious and showed dismay at the waiting time. Muffled sighs and under-the-breath complaints. As Academic’ they were bound to follow laws of courtesy – thus, not being able

to badmouth someone in customer service or otherwise. Counterproductive to how the Academy had come to be known. They were courteous, the only good trait about them.'

Clap, an extension materialized. The café grew. She quickly ran to the main door and offered seats. Thus, the morning rush was handled at an efficient pace. The clock rang at 08:00, and most of the students ran to their classes. Class 3-2, on the other hand, remained for homeroom. A classroom was arranged on the upper floors and was signed off by the Director.

"Good morning students," he entered, "-the morning rush sure was one to behold," he looked at Lilia, "-do I presume it's common every day?"

"Yeah," she nodded, "-we won't have time to do school work if we continue paying attention to the cafeteria. We're grateful, however, the workload between preparing for the election and actual school work is heavy. You've noticed earlier, most of our class is tired. We don't get enough sleep as is."

"I see," he crossed his arms, "-you are running a business. I didn't account for a lack of motivation. No matter, we can always employ townsfolk. It takes away from the charm of students serving students... oh well, if it's what you want, it is what you'll get."

Arde rose his hand, "-I'd like to weigh in."

"Speak."

"I don't mind the work if the hours are reduced. I mean, we get up earlier anyway and the dormitories are nearby. I get it's a hassle for the girls – I speak for the boys, we're willing to put more effort if the teacher grants a pay raise."

"Absolutely not."

"Why not?"

"Don't you get it?" he shook his head, "-no matter, think about why I assigned you guys to work as one. Don't think about the money or service, think about the reason."

A short handsome fellow knocked, "-may I enter?"

"You are Ken, correct?"

"Yes, I've been assigned to your class as a replacement."

"You have it here," he faced the class, "-Ken Keio will be your new substitute teacher. "

"Are you going somewhere?" Arde narrowed.

He scanned the crowd, "-there's a reason why I was given a teaching position. It's not for my intellect, rather, tis for my powers. You ought to remember," a chilling silence held their tongue, "-I'll be in touch, contact Elixia or Yui if you're in trouble."

He left the classroom, '-they should be fine. Lilia's a smart girl, she'll understand the purpose of why I asked them to work such a difficult shift. Now then,' he grabbed the briefcase and headed for the office, '-the real reason why I got called into work,' he pushed the doors to the Director's office. Teresa sat at

the helm with crossed arms. Enfia stood at her side as Memphe, the secret of Enfia's true identity remained between her and Staxius.

"Hello father," said a fatigued tone, "-been a while, hasn't it."

"You look bad," he sat, "-let's get on with it. Draebala, what of it."

"We have news a revolutionist faction born from the vestige of the Aapith Nation and the Shadow Army is standing against the advance of Artanos and the Heavenly realm. They managed to get back a portion of the land and established a portal for teleportation. We don't know how long they'll keep the stronghold but I hear, from the Demon Academy, that the Titans are building their forces for a full-on slaughter. Artanos must really want the victory. I know no one else with the power to rival the gods. Will you, my father, take on the responsibility of fighting the legion of Heavenly army?"

"Throwing me into war," he tapped the table, "-and I assume that's why Ken was assigned to my class?"

"Class 3-2 is a shining example of what can become of General Studies. You've served your purpose by setting an example. Tis their job to follow the path."

"And I'm going in alone."

"Correct. We need the prince and princesses here to maintain the balance."

"What about Leviathan? He has Gluttony."

"You will find it in Draebala," she smiled, "-here a report from one of my men. It's a station on the main continent in the hidden Korne mountain range. Should be a simple assignment, yes?"

"Teresa," he paused, "-you used full control and counter. Good, I like how the negotiation went. I suppose there are quite a few things I need to settle. A solo adventure seems nice," he inhaled, '-most likely going to last a few months, even years if it comes to battle. She's asking me to start an insurgency against that army. Draebala heavily limits the powers of other domains' interference – it's the perfect battleground for individuals, not domains. Yeah, we're finally moving into the final stages. The dreams I've had, the premonitions I've felt. It's coming to reality. Gaining support in Draebala from the fallen demon king's army will greatly influence my reach. One way or the other, the final battle will be on Draebala – no use harming reality... I trust Artanos to not make a foolish decision.'

"Father?"

"My apologies," he stood, "-how long until it's stabilized?"

"Two days?"

"Good," he clapped, "-I'm headed to Orin for a visit, I'll teleport to Draebala directly, the transportation device is ready," he put one foot through the portal, "-take care of my children, Teresa, you too, Memphe, look after them."

Chapter 1136 The Farewell [1]

'I couldn't describe the feeling I had when I stepped through that portal. I was home, I was back home. The cradle of my birth, my upbringing and my life, my journey to where I stand. It's a bitter-sweet

feeling. My many incarnations, mainly two, left their mark on the world. A part of me knows these feelings won't return. After all, there comes a point in life where one has to yield – the present becomes the past and the future becomes the present. I was stuck in a conformist mentality, trapped by the idealism of what life as a family man would brighten. Love, compassion, joy, it is a fleeting effort, a fleeting echo in the distant passage of time. The air from atop the castle can't be replaced – it is here where I feel at home.'

A journey of a lifetime, like the circle of birth and death, returned to the start. Here, with a twirling wind about the Rosespien Castle, Staxius made his way down the alchemic tower. The desk and apparatuses remained still, frozen in a layer of dust and filled with cobwebs. 'No one's been here,' he observed, 'no one's touched my items, and no one's cared to clean the dust.' He pushed the arched door, the latter creaked, and the whole tower shirked under the pressure. The nightscape changed. He glanced at the sky, the city lights were ambiguous, rendering the stars into nothing more than fireflies lost by a campfire. Clouds and vague outlines were visible. Advertisements swapped from airships to holographic displays. Models walked in three-dimension; the whole aura changed.

'This place's evolved quite a bit,' the earrings paired, a twitch and the interface accidentally toggled. From there, a perplexed voice said, "-master?"

"Is that you, éclair?"

"MASTER, IT IS YOU!"

"No, not exactly," he went to the front of the castle, "-the various ministries sure look nice."

"Master, are you at the castle?"

"I suppose I am."

"I'll be there in a moment," static filled the channel, he tapped and switched the interface off, '-I returned for a simple reason,' the regard turned towards the distant city skyline, taller buildings, brighter decorations, and the underlying taunt or flex, how one perceived the abundant economy.

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"Master, master," a smartly dressed prime minister ran out of the castle, "-you're back," he gasped, the surrounding bodyguards were confused at why.

"Shouldn't have bothered coming," Staxius lowered his glasses, "-not nice making trouble for your employees."

éclair snapped his head back and gestured, "-leave us alone."

"My lord, we're duty-bound to be your protectors."

"Will you go against my orders?"

"Such is the will of the secret service, my lord. We're tasked with your protection, lord éclair. We won't allow the leader of the Federation to be left alone with an unknown associate. You can either return to your quarters or allow us to follow your steps."

Staxius rose his hand, “-prime minister, you have much to attend to. Please pay this old acquaintance no mind. I’ll be damned to be the one who troubles the secret service,” he propped the glasses and stared at the stars, “-I’m here to see her.”

“I understand,” éclair apologetically nodded, “-I thought we could go over politics and how the world-”

“-No,” he interjected, “-this realm is no longer my concern. It has become what it should, and I’m certain it’s being led by intelligent individuals. Besides,” he threw up his hand as a goodbye, “-talking won’t do much good, especially to the dead,” and so, as mysteriously as the entity appeared, he vanished in the night sky.

“My lord éclair, who was that man?”

“No one special,” he smiled, ‘-just the man who made all of our reality possible.’

“My lord, you look a little lost for words.”

“Don’t worry about me,” he waved his arm, “-there much we must do.”

Staxius found himself atop one of the three highest peaks within Rosespire, set in the media district, or as it had come to be known – the Commercial Hub.

‘Fast cars,’ he watched from high up, ‘-my previous lifestyle sure was something to behold. I had everything and could get whatever I want. Even now, anything I wish is within my grasp – though the influence stretches far beyond the confines of a single universe.’

A golden steed neighed, “-oh you,” the rider leaped and stormed into Staxius’s personal space with a lance drawn at her side, “-how dare you!”

“No need to burst a blood vessel,” he confidently tapped the rider’s forehead, “-Minerva.”

“Igna, you were so wrong to leave this dimension without warning. How dare you!”

“Igna is no more...” the pause dropped like an anvil, “-I no longer bear his name or his ideals. I come as one who’s gone beyond the limitations of the human experience.”

“My intel was right,” she took a step back, “-you chose the path King Alfred walked.”

“No, but I am following the cursed king’s footsteps.”

“What’s the difference?”

“...”

“No matter,” she shook her head, “-did you know Eira was worried beyond belief?”

“Was she now?”

“Yes, her and her majesty, Queen Courtney. We nearly had a war against Arda, she was under the assumption that we had gotten rid of her precious son. Let me tell you, it was the scariest month Hidros had ever experienced. We were forced to call in reinforcement from the emperor, that’s how large her threats and actions were. If not for Shanna and Synthia, the battle would have destroyed half of the continent.”

“Can’t blame a mother for caring about her offspring.” Just as he spoke, a holographic display advertising the release of the much-anticipated Jin the Ripper, starring Synthia from Apexi and Romeo from Leina. The latter’s headquarters, one of the taller skyscrapers, rose in the way distance. A cluster of similarly styled buildings sat at its side – most of the noise and advertisements pulsed in said direction, “-I wonder what event’s happening over there.”

“Honestly,” Minerva exhaled, “-Staxius, yes?”

He rose one eyebrow.

“Don’t look at me like that,” she smiled, “-I have contacts too, you know? The presence you bear isn’t the one Igna had. It’s stronger, filled with purpose, and more charming if I’d say so myself. Staxius Haggard, did you take over Igna’s personality and memory?”

“It’s a complicated explanation that would bring little to why I’ve come. No matter the name or persona I use, I’m still who I am. No one can’t say otherwise.”

“And like him,” she dangled a pair of keys and a card, “-you came for her. Go, master, go to her side and support her endeavors.”

“What’s this?”

“I wouldn’t know,” she shrugged, “-éclair asked me to deliver it. Anyway, I will meet you at the premiere, see you in a bit,” she leaped off the building to be caught by the horse, and off she sped with a trail of golden.

‘There’s a location,’ he quickly scanned the area and horned onto a warehouse placed on the outskirts of Lai, more specifically, the airstrip turned airport. The streets were empty and relatively quiet for what the Commercial Hub represented nowadays. Well, that’s not talking about the in-and-out flights.

Lights refracted against the asphalted plot where many warehouses called their homes. ‘-Rain must have fallen,’ he walked, a frosty gust whispered. The keys matched one of the hangars, ‘-I expected a warehouse, not this,’ the sheer scale went over his head as it swallowed most of the field of view. ‘-For big, this place is big,’ he tapped the keycard, “-identification confirmed, welcome Young Master,” the bolts shifted and a hiss unlocked the pressured door, ‘-fancy,’ he entered, the light automatically toggled respectively. ‘-This is,’ he blinked, the arms dropped, ‘-a collection of all my purchases... my cars and bikes,’ he looked around, ‘-everything’s here, this brings back so many memories. Who did this?’

“Probably wondering who went through the effort of collecting the items?”

“Serene?”

She dove from two containers high, “-the one and only,” she winked, her outfit was as skimpy as always, though it looked more formal today, “-and yes, it was me who did all this.”

“Why?”

“A memento,” she tapped, “-or mementos?” she crossed her arms with a pause and signaled Staxius, “-I was throughout in collecting all the stuff you ever made. We have the paintings, the scrolls to even the first iteration of the crafting table used to make God’s ale and Angel’s dust. It’s your items and God forbid they fall into the wrong hands. We’ve also got staff and spells you cast during your battles, blades

used and tossed. I was going to get people who were involved mummified, Julius said I was a bit too over to the top. I stopped at the non-living stuff, boring as it is.”

“You collected all these items, why?”

“For transportation. Master, I know you can cross-dimension, you were never really dead, just changed the plane to someplace more fitting of your powers. Still, doesn’t feel right to just leave this stuff around here to rot. The warehouse was built using Maicite, it should be able to handle the process of changing dimensions. Store it in the Shadow Realm – like a garage, you know.”

“Sure are thoughtful,” he glanced, “-I can’t help but notice there are fighter jets and tanks, I never made these.”

“Oh, there’s plenty of weapon in the back – many of which go against the war treaties. Biological weapons, nukes, you name it, and it’s there for your usage.”

“Pretty bold to store such items in such a place?”

“The place’s under the Nightwalker’s watch. Ain’t no way anyone’s going to make a move, no way in hell,” she tapped her wrist, a small hologram flicked up, “-I’m needed at headquarters. See you in a bit, master, the premier starts in a few hours,” she disappeared leaving a bat-shaped mist.

‘Original,’ he stepped forward to a line of expensive-looking cars, ‘-man this is amazing,’ he instantly locked on one, ‘-Void,’ he tapped and opened the door, ‘-Xerxes series, one of six,’ the engine roared with the influx of mana. The hangar opened and closed, ‘-drive safely,’ said a soft-toned voice, ‘-Yui,’ he grinned and sent it down the street.

‘A lovely drive around the city,’ he sped through traffic, premonition and heightened reflexed – godly abilities to the mind of the common folk, guided the haphazard rush. ‘-the highway is a pleasure to surf, this feels amazing,’ he shifted and blasted forth. Reports of a high-speed offender reached public safety, “-we have reports of a speeding car down the highway. We’re sending the high-speed unit.”

“No need,” orders came from above, “-we’re to leave that vehicle alone. It’s owned by the monarchy, and thus, can’t be touched due to their immunity. Leave the man be, if he crashes, he crashes. They’ll handle it.”

Time showed 19:43 – the premier was set for 22:00. ‘-Rosespire’s nightlife is renowned the world over,’ he browsed the Arcanum, ‘-most of the videos I uploaded, even the ones where I played guitar has been taken down. Looks like they were immaculate in taking down anything related to the king. éclair or Elixia must have gone in and set the record straight with my story. It’s glorified to some extent... they’re even teaching my story in history classes. Who would have known,’ he sped past the sunset boulevard and headed to the Musical Academy, ‘-passing through I get memories of Celina, Syndra Lordon, Lizzie Haggard, and Ulgra Essin, all perished in the explosion so many years ago. Young talent lost to the world’s folly. I almost forgot about them,’ he pulled into a parking spot and conjured a teleportation symbol, ‘-I better pay my respects now,’ he reappeared in Dorchester, beside the Castle Garsley church. The memorial is dedicated to the Silver Guardian and those who died during the wedding.

‘May you keep your peace,’ he folded his arms in respect before their gravestones, ‘-tonight may be the last time I bid you respect, my friends. The world’s a better place. I don’t know if the dreams have come,

however, I can assure you this – what we fought for has become true. Peace is finally upon the land. Farewell.’

Chapter 1137 The Farewell [2]

“We’re here to watch the first showing of Jin the Ripper featuring the world-renowned, Synthia and Romeo. The story about a murderous killer terrorizing the growing city of Lea, set against the background of the industrial revolution, makes for a great world for storytelling. We hear the director went over budget, the movie was fought over by both Apexi and Leina for financing. The story of its making is a wonder in itself. We’re excited to see what’s to come,” the camera panned to the road, “-the actors have arrived,” flashes, interviews, a red carpet, the showing, set for 22:00 and time read 20:00, the actor’s job was yet finished. Promotion played a huge role, and so, many videos of Synthia and the cast of Jill the Ripper were uploaded over the Arcanum. People’s curiosity about an actress’s life, the famed life of a super-star, the dream of the people, such as the driving motivation wherein conspiracies brought the press to the movie. The plot was purposefully obscure – unseen to the outside eye, and unheard by those in production. The name, Jin the Ripper, was but a hint for Arcanum sleuths to discover.

Plenty of expensive cars arrived. Famous faces are known around not just in Hidros, but the world over. Empress Eira, of the newly crowned Alphian Empire, was in attendance with her twins and Emperor Sultria.

“Plenty of rumors have been cast at the Sultrian’s Imperial family. The people of Alpha have suffered under the oppression of the church of Lucifer and the tyranny of Cimier. Without the help of the Emperor of Iqavea and the Prime minister of Hidros, the liberation of Alpha would have been a dream. It is well-known the world is a fickle place... and here, in Hidros, the peace between continent, race, and mixed features have grown into a shining example of what co-existence can be. The unity of the people of Hidros has gotten praise from the world over, and even now, the Prime minister strived for greater understanding and peace. Hidros isn’t without its flaws,” the politically oriented channels covered the guests as opposed to the film, and similarly, the gossip channels aired, “-rumors of Synthia and Romeo having a love affair got our press in bad trouble. Lawyers knocked outdoors demanding the rumors, libel, as they say, to be an insult to their client. Our legal team wasn’t one to back down, and thus, we fought for our rights to publication. The case was settled shortly before going to trial – we won on the conditions of not covering half-truths. We kept the right to our freedom and are acting based on our beliefs. Our coverage is in no way intended for defamation. It’s entertainment,” the host sighed, “-with the disclaimers out of the way, let’s get into the main course.” Photos and videos were shown, “-it’s clear Romeo and Synthia have something in common. They share close bonds and have been seen kissing on more than one occasion. The movie, in a way, is a romantic story between a killer and a detective, each not knowing the other’s identity. Contrary to other channels’ coverage, we have the inside scoop. Our most damning piece is that of Romeo taking Synthia on a long drive right after the shoot – we tracked them to the red-light district. And there, without permission to record, were forced to stop the investigation. This didn’t deter our men from pursuing the truth. They spotted the duo entering a love hotel, and thus, we conclude that Romeo and Synthia are in a relationship. We also found out about Synthia’s supposed fiancé; she wears an engagement ring on many occasions. However, when in the presence of Romeo, the ring mysteriously disappears,” the host tapped the table, the camera panned to another well-dressed man, “-we have a guest.”

A c-list celebrity, “-tell us,” the host probed, “-what is the secret hidden by Leina?”

“Romeo is an insult to his namesake. The character experienced true love with Juliet and even went as far as to die for his love and I quote. ‘-Thus with a kiss, I die. O happy dagger, this is thy sheath; there rust, and let me die.’ Our Romeo, the superstar, is more of a Giacomo Casanova. ‘-Cultivating whatever gave pleasure to my sense was always the chief business of my life; I never found any occupation more important. Feeling that I was born for the sex opposite of mine, I have always loved it and done all that I could to make myself loved by it,’ the following quote was taken from Casanova, however, we can find the exact words copied by Romeo in more than few occasion. He’s a womanizer to his core, a walking vice who is best locked away from married wives.”

“Miao, please wait a moment,” the host interjected, “-why do you speak so harshly about Romeo?”

“Because my wife left me to be with him,” he slammed the table, “-I woke up one day to find her gone. Only a note remained at her beside...”

“And your wife, Miao, was none other than the shining star of Enar, Carla Ornal, a songstress originating from the revived Drejai.”

“Yes... she’s an amazing songstress who’d talent went unrecognized until I went to Iqavea for work. I’m not saying she’s ungrateful, however, I did allow her to climb the social ladder, despite my better judgment. She worked hard and we soon began dating, the love grew into a passion, and shortly after marriage followed. We were happy, I began getting more roles and her, more bookings. It was on one of those faithful shows her eyes crossed Romeo’s. I thought nothing of it... alas, what can a powerless man do but watch his companion be stolen? I contemplated suicide, and honestly, I still do think about ending everything. My career fell through and I have nothing more to live for.”

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“Why then, why are you here?”

“To speak the truth,” he dropped a box onto the counter, “-here’s evidence to back my story. I won’t stand for his fan taking his side. I have concrete evidence and I will bring that damned womanizer down even if I have to die. Carla, I hope your happy,” he let a smirk, “-looks like Casanova found another woman to please his desires. You’re dead to me,” he lit a picture on fire, “-DON’T EVER-” the feed cut.

‘Mother of all that is holy,’ Staxius drove towards the cinema, ‘-there’s always something happening in Hidros, isn’t there,’ he turned off the feed, ‘-Synthia’s involved romantically with Romeo. Such is the word out on the street. Maybe they’re right,’ he pulled onto the side of a street and entered a lavish tailoring shop, ‘-maybe she’s romantically involved with another. Who am I to interject in her quest for true love? If I’m honest with myself, I’ve never truly felt love for anyone except Shanna. She’s the one I hold in my heart, the first lady who chipped at my barriers and allowed me the pleasure of becoming a father. I can’t thank her enough. Synthia also, she’s someone I respect and care for. Igna loved her... and this is how she repays him, or so I think. Can’t assume unless I have the evidence,’ he tapped the interface, *SSY,* the prompt turned a red hue, “-information pertaining to Synthia and Romeo.”

“Understood.”

‘No escaping the watchful eye of our surveillance,’ he stepped inside a clean and classy-looking store. Mannequins wore fashionable outfits – superstars advertised high-end suits, one of the attendants beamed a beautiful smile, “-how may I help you, sir?”

“I’m looking for a suit,” he widened his arms, “-something suitable for a night at a high-end event.”

A well-combed gentleman crossed his field of view, they exchanged glances, “-we have various items, sir, mind taking a look at our collection?”

“Suppose there are no other options.”

The distant gentleman veered his slowed march, “-pardon my intrusion,” the attendant stepped back with a gasp, “- I had to interject. My apologies. Sire, are you in the market for a suit?”

“Yes?”

“I had to come over,” he nodded at Staxius’ jacket, “-my lord, your suit is already of the highest quality. I can tell with a glance you’re a man of fashion. The cufflinks are made of black opals. Aurora Australis if I’m right, the radiance of the colors, it’s a standout piece. How might one acquire such rare gems, might I ask?”

“Connections,” he smiled, “-you’re a man of culture. Perhaps you should take up my order.”

“With pleasure.” Wasn’t long before a custom suit was drafted – the process, one of which might have taken months, was over in a few minutes. The tailor was skilled, faster than any machines, and blessed with the talent of Crafting from the gods themselves. To be precise, from the Nymph goddess, Rhapsody.

“Thank you for your patronage.”

“The feeling’s mutual,” time read 21:02. He hopped into Void and roared onto the highway, direction, the main event, the Premiere. A line of cars waited at the hotel entrance – the showing was set in an expensive hotel for tonight alone. One of the inner theaters, used for classical plays, was set to show the movie. The line moved at a reasonable pace, and the cast members and honored guests were easily out of their transport and onto the red carpet. Camera flashes dominated the area.

‘The limousine’s familiar,’ he narrowed, ‘-the black seal, right, it’s Phantom,’ he kept his pace and sharply pushed the break, ‘-what the f-’ the crowd screamed and yelled, flashes echoed like lightning.

“Romeo!”

“Synthia!”

Chants and applause – fans screamed for a chance at noticing their idols. ‘-limousine’s sure taking its time,’ he waited, the crowd kept up their energy, ‘-here we are,’ he drove up to the valet, ‘-good, everyone’s focused on the stars,’ the door opened, “-may I park your car?”

“No, it’s fine,” he exited the supercar, gently shut the door, handed a considerable tip to the valet, and smiled, “-the car drives itself, no need to worry,” the engine purred without driver, it slowly made her way to the basement. The valet widened his mouth, “-so big a tip, my lord-”

"No need for thanks," he casually tapped the man's shoulder, "-hard work begets financial rewards. Besides, I doubt the stars are generous enough to hand over large sums of money."

"You're right," he lowered his head, "-normal patron affords us their kindness and monetary rewards. Not the celebrities... glam and glitter, that's all their worth. Not to mention certain personality issues," he gritted and quickly snapped out of the daze, "-why did I reveal my inner feelings?"

"Keep up the good work," said Staxius, "-next customer." He turned away and walked up the carpet. As expected, no one paid heed as the spotlights had horned onto the superstars. He went passed the duo and gave a side-eye to Synthia, who was dressed in a beautiful but exposed dress, her arms crossed with Romeo as such to confirm the rumors.

"Synthia, what's the matter?" he pulled on her arms, "-my apologies," he charmingly smiled for the camera, "-she gets lost in thoughts a few times."

'Was that?' her heart pulsed, '-no, it can't be,' she forced herself to stare at the interviewer, "-what was the question again?"

Staxius walked with his focus on the crowd of reporters, '-look at them, they're like hungry dogs. Such an unfitting sight for intelligent people,' a demi-human with white bunny ears caught his attention, the lass' short stature and heavy camera on her shoulder made her world rather difficult. The taller reporters pushed her around, "-identification," said a guard. Staxius nonchalantly flashed his id, the guard widened his mouth and bowed heavily, "-YOUNG MASTER!" he yelled, part of the crowd shifted their gaze, like waves crashing against the beach, only to return to the greater pool, and their attention drifted back on the superstars.

"Don't scream," he smiled, "-am I allowed a guest?"

"Young master, you own the hotel, you're free to do whatever you want."

"Alright," he singled out the reporter, "-have her changed in a formal dress and sent to my room."

The guard gave an understanding stare, "-as you wish, young master."

1138 The Farewell [3]

"At the risk of sounding impudent. Why have you called on me, mister?"

"At the risk of sounding impudent?" a mischievous smirk, followed by a tap of the bedroom door, "-your dress, young master," said an attendant.

"Thank you," he locked the door, shuffled to the reporter's side, and dropped the dress onto her lap, "-you were getting crushed by the others earlier. Think of it as a favor from a whimsical man."

"Who are you?" she looked around, "-to afford this room and be bowed to by the staff, you must be very affluent."

"Oh, my identity is of no issue," he lit a cigarette and sat facing the bright city, "-you're the one who wrote the article and hosted the interview about the love life of Synthia and Romeo, were you not?"

"Yes," she unbuttoned her outfit, "-the scoop got me a pretty penny."

"Well, you've struck gold," he puffed, "-the first seat to the drama of stars. Should be good research material. You'll have to dress the part, can't afford to stand out when there's much on the line. You're infamous among their circles – I've heard whispers of assassins being hired to end your life. Hey," he turned, "-you might be a demi-human, but your body is still as human as it gets. A single well-placed bullet and it's over."

She grunted, "-death threats don't affect me," she stared and undressed, "-besides, if I were smart, I'd have never followed a stranger into a high-class suite."

"Consider me impressed."

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"By the way," she climbed onto the bed dressed in only her undergarments, "-you're the first man who brought me to my panties without making a move, what sort of person are you?" she bit her lips, her bunny ears invitingly flickered, "-tell me more."

"A man who has his hand tied," he pointed at the door, "-you better cover-up."

The lock didn't do much, the handle dipped and a blonde-haired fellow wandered inside with widened arms, "-my cousin," he proclaimed.

"Julius," Staxius returned, "-we might own the hotel, however, I didn't think ownership would throw etiquette out the window?"

He quickly scanned the room, "-did I intrude?"

"You sure did," Staxius rose from his chair, undid the first few buttons, and meandered towards the half-exposed demi-human, "-this lovely flower was generous enough to allow a fool to have a taste."

"My-" Julius held his breath, "-stop the play," the shoulders dropped as did the casual smile, now upside down, "-I was under the impression you were engaged?"

"So was I," he sat beside the reporter, "-I'll be down in a few minutes. Could you keep the door close?"

"Fine," he spun, "-cousin, please make it quick, I rather not miss the little chance we have of speaking."

Silence set, "-apologies."

"Julius Haggard," she placed her hands atop his, "-you're his cousin?"

"I suppose I am," he smiled, "-you're not going to undress only based on my status are you?" he leaned over, "-I bear the Haggard family name. Is that reason enough to get inside your pants?"

She crossed her legs and tightened her lips, "-I had to say it," she bit, her jaw firmed, "-I-I, you're right," she exhaled, "-that name alone is enough for me," she jumped and straddled Staxius, throwing her hands around her back and slowly kissing his forehead to his cheeks, "-yes, it's vanity, it's selfishness, and it's lust," her eyes watered, "-..."

"Yeah, that's enough," he grabbed her wrist and raised them above her head, "-I'm not worthy of keeping your company. This could have been a one-night stand, well, I'd have said yes if not for the underlying feeling I sensed. You're trying too hard," he got on his feet, "-trying hard is good and perhaps

it would have worked with another man. Don't lump in with those lustful bastards," he narrowed, "-if I want someone, I'll have them with by my own means," he threw a towel over her head, "-go cool off in the shower and get dressed. You can call me Lyoko. Give me a call when you're ready, and I'll come by to pick you up. Don't waste this opportunity, Gemma, it's the perfect chance to network and grow the brand."

"Don't storm off," she dug her heels into the carpet, "-I demand an apology... WHY DID YOU LEAD ME ON?"

"For a lesson," he smiled, "-what do you do when the other side refuses?"

"..."

"Simple," he said, reaching for the handle, "-you get something they can't refuse."

'...' inspiration flickered, "-and, did you bring me here just to say that, or are you after information?" she snuck forward and wrapped her arms around his waist, "-we of the bunny people are very much known for our rapid reproductions. It's a survival instinct – and honestly, I'm having a hard time fighting my urges," her hands caressed his stomach and crotch area invitingly, "-you're strong, give me your seed."

"There now," he tapped her head, "-no charging into battle unprotected. I'm not giving you anything," he whispered, "-however," he leaned towards her right ear, "-if it's a trade, then I don't mind sharing what I have."

Staxius exited the room a few minutes later, '-she was easy to break,' he wiped the lipstick on his face, '-I've never slept with a demi-human before. They're quite the passion mongers. I hope she gets up in time – might have gone a little overboard with my spells.'

Gemma shook like a leaf, '-my first time,' she gasped and giggled, '-and it was amazing. I've never felt so... I don't know,' she barely kept her saliva in check, '-he gave me the gift of knowledge and the gift of pleasure. Lyoko, a man of giving... it's finally here,' she looked outside, '-my work's only getting started.'

Staxius casually made it to the star-filled lobby. Many guests were still coming. He took the path of least recognition and headed to the bar fitted next to the grant pool facing the city. Suits and dresses, pretty faces and harsh snarls, "-made it?"

"Julius," he took a seat at the bar, "-how's it going?"

"You tell me," Julius sipped, "-did you sleep with her?"

"Who?"

"The reporter. I know her well," he lit a cigarette and watched the various clicks, "-she's made many stories on my starlets. It's unnerving how she gets her information. I've tried to get a firm hold on what gets out... well, it's whatever, she's not hurting anyone. Makes for good publicity anyway," he looked at Staxius harshly, "-Igna, where have you been all this time? You died... or so they say. The kingdom nearly fell... you should have seen mother, she nearly started world-war two on her own."

"Bit of an overreaction I think?"

"No, it was worth the reaction. You're the damned founder of this nation. Peace, as it stands now, wouldn't have been possible. You made it happen. Granted there were a lot of hurdles up to this point and I take my fair share of the blame. I did feel used and abandoned – you were like that; I couldn't blame you. It's just how you are."

"I use people," Staxius sipped, "-and people use me. One hand washes the other. How are the children, and how's the wife, I hope they're doing well."

"The wife keeps me up at night and during the day. We recently moved to Alpha – Apexi's expanding our business."

"I heard a little something about Alpha. What happened to the ministry of Internal and external affairs?"

"You mean Eira?" he looked around and pointed sharply to the left, "-why don't you ask her."

The stoic empress of Alpha arrived in the company of her husband, her first daughter, Gallienne, and her twins, "-been a few years since we last saw each other, she brought life to the loved ones. Been very unremarkable the last few years. Renowned warriors settling down, stars rising to power, and the distant curse of war and death slowly being forgotten and replaced by the Arcanum and the media. It's welcomed evolution," and there, Julius rose his arms at the imperial couple. Eira turned to turn to the counter, and she blinked, flattering her white eyelashes, "-it can't be," her composed pose crumbled, "-it can't be..."

She dashed to his side, none was the wiser save a breath of icy-cold air, "-you're alive!"

"Eira," he grabbed her cheeks and smiled, "-you've grown so much, my daughter."

Her smile crumbled, she grabbed his wrist and pulled him to the side, "-don't tell me-"

"Staxius Haggard," he returned, "-it's me, I've returned. I died, Eira. I died. Igna's no more. I apologize for not being able to stop the curse when I should have. I nearly lost you... it was one of the few last straws. Igna couldn't handle the pain of loss... and here I am. I've returned."

"Why..." she clenched her fist, "-after all this time... you return and say that..."

"I'm not that great of a father," he smiled and stared over the balustrade, "-Eira, you are and always will be a strong woman. You've gotten older and have matured. You have a family and kids. It's time to leave the past behind. By past," he grabbed her hand, "-I mean me. I'm a Deadman walking, I don't exist in this plane anymore, my time ended years ago. I accomplished what I set out to, and here, to see you happy with your family is a sight I'll always cherish, my dearest daughter, Eira."

"Father..." she lowered her gaze, "-I'm sorry for not walking by your side. I wanted nothing more than to stand at your side on the battlefield. Since I was abandoned, you were here, either as my father or my brother, it didn't matter, I knew you were here. Putting a title on our relationship was a dumb idea... I know you were there, hidden deep inside Igna's heart. I can finally say this with my chest," she rose her gaze, "-thank you, father, for everything."

A thud, ‘my heart,’ he stared into nothingness, ‘-that smile, her aura... it’s the same one I felt so many, many eons ago. The first time she called out to me... that feeling, it’s remained for so long. Eira’s really my daughter...’ he smiled, “-thank you for giving me so many memories, Eira.”

“If it isn’t my brother-in-law,” came a confident-looking Markus, “-without your help, I’d have never taken back Alpha. Thank you, Igna.”

“Don’t mention it,” he smiled, “-and the twins, who are they?”

“Igna II Haggard and Staxius II Haggard,” said Eira, “-to honor the memories of men who gave us purpose and faith in the future.”

“I wish we could stay and chat,” said Markus, “-the premiere’s an excuse to deal with an uprising... will you join us at the tabl-”

Staxius rose his hand, “-no, but I appreciate the sentiment.”

“I guess they were right,” Markus unknowingly showed his sentiment, a flash of melancholy, “-the golden era of the Haggard has come to an end,” he inhaled, “-at least when it comes to the world. Brother-in-law, I’m grateful for everything you’ve done, I can’t stress it enough. I, as well as my family who couldn’t make it tonight, bid thee our respect,” and so, the imperial family of Alpha headed into the distance.

“You haven’t forgotten me, have you?”

He side-glanced, “-Aunt Elvira?”

“-and here too,” another lady grabbed and pinched his cheek, “-mother?” he blinked.

“We have to speak. Elvira, you can have him after I’m done,” she grabbed him by the hand and headed to a secluded part of the pool, “-Igna, why did you leave the mortal realm?”

“Mother...” he exhaled, “-Igna’s dead. He died trying to rescue Sathanas. Persephone, I should speak to you about Lord Death and his ties with Creation,” he went into details about the dual-personality.

“I knew he was a shrewd one,” she giggled, “-it’s good to see you in good shape. I won’t ask much, you’re here for one last time, aren’t you?”

“How did you-”

“I’ve been there myself, Staxius. I know that feeling all too well. Take in Orin and all that it represents. Make sure to speak to the allies you’ve left behind, perhaps recruit some for future endeavors, you never know.”

Chapter 1139 The Farewell [Finale]

The time came for the premiere, the actual showing. Moments elapsed between sharing drinks with friends and families and catching up on old times all to the dismay of the general populous, who ignorantly were kept in the dark about the royal secret.

“Does this look weird?”

“Gemma,” Staxius broke from the bar and locked arms with the demi-human. For one of her kind, she truly was beautiful – the clothes did make the individual. With a pretty flower in hand and a strong drink in the other, time was nigh. The theater took lines, and from there, guests were seated by status. Superstars and producers had priority on the middle and higher seats, sitting upfront was rather tedious on the neck. As he’d have it, Staxius was given a seat just below Synthia and Romeo. The actors took their seats, her dress was magnificent and slightly awkward, such the pity of choosing vanity over comfort. Romeo casually entertained the praise of co-stars, ‘-he’s got a big ego,’ Staxius surmised with the few distant observations, ‘-I’d get an ego too if my partner was a goddess,’ he emptily glanced at Synthia, she unwillingly crossed his gaze.

‘Igna...’ she gulped, ‘-my heart’s racing, why is he here... I noticed him earlier, why didn’t he speak to me, why isn’t he doing anything to get my attention?’ her inner-conversation drowned the outside, where, a teasing chant mumbled.

“Kiss her, kiss her, kiss her,” whispered the chosen guests. All eyes befell Romeo, he threw his arm over her shoulder and leaned in for a passionate kiss. The crowd exploded, fangirls over their favorite idols, romance, and ecstasy of a scandalous display ‘-feats of PDA, public display of affection, was yet accepted in the capital. People were reserved, and to see stars, ones to maintain their image as guides, appallingly bid ideals adieu for publicity.

‘WHY NOW?’ her focus rocked, Romeo delivered a nice embrace, and her cheeks reddened as one of the girls shouted in jest, “-she’s embarrassed,” they cried, “-so adorable.”

Romeo widened his body movement, hers diminished, ‘-did he see?’ Staxius watched the whole scene, not even once letting go of her stare, ‘-he saw everything,’ a sinking sensation dropped, ‘-my stomach feels heavy,’ her hands shook – Romeo nonchalantly threw his hands in between her thighs and winked, the lights darkened.

“Lyoko?”

“Nothing,” he escorted Gemma, “-someone caught my eye, that’s all. By the way, you should check your messages,” a ping, she took out her phone, her jaws dropped – the lights went out and they sat.

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“How did you get this image?” she whispered.

“Don’t mention it,” he smiled, “-it’ll fetch a great price. Consider this my payment and thank you.”

“No, no,” she dropped her head, “-I should be thanking you.”

“You’ve done plenty,” he casually tapped her head and smiled, “-I was wrong to take advantage of your position earlier. I hope this proves to be adequate compensation.’

“Not exactly a bad memory,” she beamed, “-I’ve never experienced such... pleasure,” she blushed, “-I don’t know what to-”

“Hush, the movies started.”

For starts, it was standard, the story was rather riveting. Everyone’s eyes were glued, each passing moment, the emotion expressed and the clever narrative – one viewed from two perspectives, good and

evil, tied by the unknowing bonds of romance, neatly gathered the concept. It was amazing to see the director's work. One scene stood out from the rest.

Set inside a café with a bias toward luxury and refinement, the unwitting couple grew suspicious of one another.

"Why, why did you lie?"

"I didn't lie," she replied.

"A lie is a lie," he reinforced, "-no matter what, I must find the truth, even if it kills me. I will find salvation for the victims."

"Stop playing the hero, you're not a hero. The people who were killed are no longer of this world, they were sex workers, ruffians, not worthy of society."

"NO MATTER," he rose his voice, "-a life, is a life," the tone dropped, "-and whoever stands in the way of said fact should be ashamed."

"Reckless abandon," she threw up her arms, "-don't be a fucking hypocrite."

"What do you mean?"

"Those following the law are the worst hypocrite this world can face. You and your department are corrupt, you take bribes and leave the victims to face their end without a single shred of sympathy for their situation. Your justice is self-serving, nothing you do is ever sufficient. Selfish, ignorant, and above all, clueless to how I feel."

"JILL!"

"Don't-" she glared, "-I'll never accept your world, and you will never accept mine. This has been the truth from the beginning, we knew who we were when we met. The moments we shared, the lives we lived, it was a nice distraction. I could never love another as I did you, Gilbert. We end it today," the mask fell, "-you will find the answer."

"So, you are the murderer."

"..."

From there, the plot intensified heavily, playing on both sides' emotions. Did the murder feel remorse or was she in love, did the inspector use his position as an excuse or was he ready to yield the trauma of the past – no matter where one stood, there was genuine chemistry. A forbidden bond, a forbidden love, the taste of the unknown – life on the edge, such was the movie. Aside from the romance, the addition of real-world cases, and inspiration drawn from the infamous Jack the Ripper, was the perfect touch, a harmonious blend. The ending was hit or miss, it never answered the questions spoken in the beginning. Not a cliffhanger, but there were hints – the director's approach of showing stills after a great shootout, would prove essential. A plot of said caliber, with such intensity of emotions and characters, couldn't have a simple ending – there was more to it, and even now, after shooting, there laid deliberation on how it should have ended. Using stills from newspaper clippings narrated by both characters ensured hope, a faith that the two would meet.

‘Interesting idea,’ Staxius turned, Gemma was in tears. She wept. A similar emotion hung over the theater – he observed the many faces and breathed a smile, ‘-Synthia did it. She became an actress of world-renown. I can tell from the performance; she worked the hardest to bring life to her character. Seeing it firsthand brings me joy, she’s worked hard and her effort paid off,’ a genuine grin surfaced, ‘-this is the happy ending. If she’s content with another, who am I to interject,’ he rose, “-Lyoko?” Gemma wiped her tears, “-where are you going? The show’s not over, they’ve still to do the credits and give their thanks.”

“Look at you with all the knowledge,” he added with a sarcastic smile, “-it’ll be best you don’t remember me. Forget we ever met, keep the memories but don’t try to follow – you will get hurt,” he flashed a handgun, “-it was a pleasure making your acquaintance, Gemma, I wish you all the best,” he leaned and kissed her forehead, “-farewell.” A spell of concealment easily erased his aura.

Staxius was soon outside with the wind crashing against his face, *snap,* he lit a cigarette and puffed, “-the movie was great,” he walked over to a timidly lit garden where a few couples made their proclamations. He sat on one of the empty benches and stared at the cloudy sky, ‘-the visit was nice,’ he puffed, ‘-I got to bid everyone farewell. I got to see my family and what my actions brought. To think Hidros was separated – nothing seems to be real anymore. I’ve lost touch with reality; my memories of the past are fading – what I lost in the exchange for power is something I can’t take back. Why does it matter anyway... I’ve done my job. I suppose everything could be stopped here... it might as well end... however, there’s a greater threat out there. He’s going to come; I feel his presence – my awakening and his coming – the only entity abled to rival my provenance,’ he flicked the bud into the bin and relaxed, ‘-take in what I can. Draebala’s the final destination.’

“Igna?”

He looked over his shoulder, “-Synthia?”

“I thought it was you,” she wrapped around and exhaled deeply, “-why are you here?”

“Didn’t I promise I’d come to your premiere?”

“Are you dumb?” she stomped, “-leaving the otherworld to their own demise might put reality in jeopardy.”

“Ha-ha,” he laughed, “-don’t be a fucking hypocrite.”

“Pardon?”

“Quoting the movie. You should know, shouldn’t you?”

“Know what?”

“Nothing,” he exhaled, “-doesn’t really matter. Romeo’s out there looking for you, Synthia.”

“Why bring up his name, are you jealous?”

“Am I jealous?” the expression tightened, “-am I jealous she asks. Knowing you, I can’t very well add what I think. Afterall, I am responsible for tainting your reputation as a chased goddess, I can’t very well stand here and demand affection and respect. What I did was wrong in many ways and even if I don’t care about my action, taking away the title of the chase wasn’t... never mind. Look here, Synthia, you

were granted a new life and a new start. There's no need to think back, do what you want, and think what you must."

"Starting to sound like an angry ex."

"Seriously?" he grabbed her forehead, "-don't you fucking dare. Synthon, I'm far worse than you can imagine. Don't play coy with me, I don't take disrespect kindly, not from you, not from anyone."

"You're not Igna," she grabbed his wrist and poured mana, "-who are you?"

"Staxius Haggard," he pulled, taking more of her mana and calling the bluff, "-and right now, with the power I have, I can erase your title of a goddess with a simple snap of my hand. I took your purity, I can also take your title and your life."

"Enough, enough," Julius leaped in and forcibly pulled Staxius' hand, "-this is my bad. I'm sorry, it was a joke gone too far."

"A joke?" he widened his arms, "-I suppose I should apologize," a domain expanded over the whole of Hidros, "-I can play jokes too." The coldness of his power truly manifested. Those able to sense, sensed, and God did they shirked, "-this presence," many fell to their knees, "-what's happening."

"Enough," came a thunderous echo, "-this has gone on long enough."

He retracted the realm, "-Goddess of Law and Justice, also known as the Goddess of Judgement, have you come to mediate our conflict?"

A goddess descended from a split in reality – she wielded a long sword, which when placed upside down, resembled a scale. Tharis eyes were hidden behind a black cloth, her robe was white and gold, and split at the hip to reveal her long legs. She landed, "-to the one going by the moniker of Adjudicator, we must leave for my realm immediately."

"As you wish," he looked at Synthia and smiled, '-I know you're lying, idiot. Don't play the heroine, it doesn't suit you. And yes, I did get jealous when that fool kissed you, no one should have the right to press their lips against the one I vowed to marry. You might have fooled the world – you couldn't fool me. It was an act on behalf of Tharis. You owe her for rescuing you. Syhton, I will need your help in the future – keep evolving and amass the power of belief, for when the time comes, I will need you.'

Her gaze lowered, '-Staxius,' and hid her face between her palm, '-you don't know how much this hurts. To see you mingle with another, I gave you my everything and swore to be yours. I had to do what I had to... Staxius, you're the one I choose and the one I gave my heart to. Sadly, circumstances have said otherwise,' the meaning glances and lastly, their last shared message through telepathy.

Somewhere in the vastness of the multiverse, a fortune teller read, "-Staxius left Orin, forever bidding his home world farewell, a true sign of him giving his humanity for power and responsibility above the station of a simple mortal. The fate of reality alters, and at the center – like Orin, is Staxius Haggard," said a gentle female tone, "-one can say the whole journey until now was preparation for what comes next. Your destiny and fate are woven with destruction, Staxius, I see all and know all, you will come to hate yourself... when that day comes, it will be your responsibility to slay him."

"I know, mother, I know."

Chapter 1140 Tharis, the Goddess of Judgement

“Adjudicator, I require your hand in marriage.”

“Pardon?” Staxius replied, not knowing the consequences of what lay ahead.

“Syhton was the perfect choice as your partner in the mortal realm. However, when it comes to the treacherous world of the divine, without assistance from other deities, and I can guarantee there will be none who’d wish to ally with destruction, you have nothing but to choose me.”

“Might I sleep on it?”

“On it, you may,” she replied eloquently, “-where are you headed?”

“To Ragno. The portal to Draebala should be ready. Let’s postpone the discussion for then, is that acceptable, goddess?”

Tharis, the strong and lawful, took her time in scanning Staxius from top to bottom. After all, none had come to know each other – ideas of the other’s image were brought from hearsay and rumors.

‘Staxius, as my followers have researched, is a man of honor when it counts. He purposefully chose anarchy as his way of delivering his justice and his ideals.’ She took a step, “-well, Staxius, the offer will stand until next week. If by then I don’t hear from you, I will be forced to follow my plans. Justice has to be brought to the world, and in you, Staxius, I choose to believe. It is hard to find allies, you know much better yourself.”

And thus, without the slimmest bit of hassle – Tharis called forth a dragon, a majestic beast of which each flap of the wings shook the very ground. She easily climbed its back and rode upward into the gemlike clouds. Tharis’ realm was expansive, “-the nearest town is to the south,” she said and rode in the opposite direction.

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‘Tharis’ realm,’ Staxius conjured his wings and hovered, ‘-to the north is the capital, that’s where she’s headed,’ he observed, ‘-and to the south, a city. The construction looks pretty archaic, a wood and stone-bricked building. A scenery beloved by any avid fantasy enjoyer,’ he flew south and soon entered the city.

‘My core’s unresponsive to the people,’ he ambled, checking over crowds at merchant stalls and admiring the large walls separating the various districts, ‘-my word, these people are rich and they know it. There’s abundance... no sign of oppression nor is there any sign of trouble. They live with smiles... so I’d think, most of ’em wear a neutral expression, going through the world with careless abandon,’ he continued to the plaza, where taverns, inns, and restaurants could be plucked from the lines of buildings, ‘-Tharis’ has achieved a realm of non-violence. Her people are not fighters, they barely register on my detection spell.’

Just then, an incident begot the cries of confused onlookers. He rushed and looked over his shoulder, ‘-no one’s following me?’ he slowed the pace and walked. A child was hit in the face by his father, the former bled tearlessly. The onlookers, from what it seemed were one of the child’s friends who cried on behalf of the assault.

"What is the matter?" city guards dressed in uniforms approached.

"I have the right to discipline my child however I wish," the father exclaimed.

"In accordance with our goddess' creed, you and your child must come to the city hall for evaluation. Any witnesses who wish to join may accompany us," the strong officer scanned the crowd, even the girl who'd screamed out on another's behalf hid her face. Staxius rose hand. The crowd silently judged.

'Should be interesting,' he followed and soon was before a court of law. 'Seems coming to court is standard,' arrangement was rather perplexing as it looked to be more than a few courts were lined one after the other. A priestess of Tharis presided over the current incident. The father and child were separated using a walkway going down the middle of the seats. The officer stood in the middle, with no lawyers, as he'd come to expect. Only a scale presided over judgment – a golden statue of Tharis dressed in a simple robe held a scale of differing color, unlike the statue, at a glance was fixed, the scale was flexible and tipped on either side. Staxius sat to the side and made to face the judge and seats.

"My lady priestess, we found this man slapping his child in the middle of the street."

"And he said he was in his right to slap the boy?" she followed, "-I have a grasp on the situation," she placed both hands at the statue's feet and tipped her head, "-by the decree of my goddess, please find blame in the wrong and justice for the wronged." A timid glow pulsed at the table, a pen freely wrote, the scale tipped against the father, and blame fell onto the boy, "-to the father who assaulted his child, you're guilty of bringing nuisance to the public. As such, you are to be sentenced to a stay-at-home for a month. The boy who stole from the stands will be brought to a higher court to justify his actions. As such, by the order of her divine empress of justice, the sentences will be carried out in good faith."

"Please no!" said the father, "-I wish to apologize for my son's action. He's but a child, he's foolish and doesn't know the world as I do. I have failed in my duty. As such, my lady priestess, allow me to carry my child's burden."

The priestess widened her arms, guards entered the room, "-justice if finale, judgment is true. What's said can't be taken back, thus, you will be forced to pay the price of your crimes. Lest, the witness invokes the right of trial by combat, therein, either setting your crimes free or bringing down the hammer of justice."

He looked at the crowd with an annoyed expression, "-I came to watch, not participate," he stood, "-no matter," he looked at the father and child, "-instead of freedom, why not have them serve the same sentence. A homestay of father and son, some bond building, what say you, priestess?"

She paused, '-no one's ever tried to alter a priestess' judgment. Even the witness knows not to go against the law of our guardian. I have no idea how to solve this childish matter,' she tapped her fingers and stared upward, '-how am I supposed to '

"Seem the issue' grown out of hand," a stronger presence entered the court, another priestess from her robe and solemn aura, "-tell me, are you having trouble?"

"Arch-priestess," the fellow lowered her head, "-here's a log," a scroll hovered before the arch-priestess, she cautiously glanced over the paper and narrowed Staxius' nonchalant stance.

"I must say, the matter isn't so hard to resolve. Follow the judgment for it is true and worthwhile. Sadly, I can see merit in the witness' suggestion. As so," she looked at the witness, "-are you perchance the man known as Staxius Haggard?"

"Maybe?"

The arch-priestess exhaled, "-I will accept the witness' suggestion. He is the one our empress chose to stand at her side. Herein I present, Staxius Haggard, our goddess' partner." A surprised coldness froze the room, Staxius looked around cluelessly to no avail. Judgment was passed and they were outside in the main hall watching as fellow cases were brought to the ear of beautiful priestesses.

"If you would follow me," said the arch-priestess, "-exiting our goddess' realm can be tedious. We have a portal readied at the cathedral," her blond locks flowed, the main hallway was large and stretched many floors above, and the middle split to house trees and decorations, an oval roof made of glass shone light upon the floor, '-this place is majestic.'

"Pardon me for earlier."

"Why so?"

"You see, I was told you're not from here. Our realm is very different from what others might expect. It's very common for travelers to be lost and bewildered at how justice is done. We're used to housing strangers of other worlds, it's very common. After all, like the Hall of Rebirth known as the final judgment for the demented, we exist to guide the souls of neutral parties to their revival or eternal rest, depending on their will. What you saw earlier is an example of said truth. They appear to be father and son, and real... alas, it's far from the truth. They're fragmented souls who departed their realm suddenly. The truth is often found in the crime itself. The father slapping his son was a sign of abuse, ordering a stay-at-home is nothing more than a stop-gap measure. In truth, the man's a predator who abused his kind for much of their time. The boy, on the other hand, isn't as innocent as he looks, for he was the one who eventually killed his father, the predator. They're both, through the jaded lens of judgment, guilty of their crimes. A big part of our goddess' realm is to give the opportunity for reformation. We judge daily and have done so for thousands of years. Witnesses are called, well, witnesses. Not everything is cut and dry, there are minute variables to be accounted for," she shook her head gently, "-forgive me, I have a habit of going on and on."

"And I have a habit of listening," a humble silence settled, they walked further from the court and nearer to a massive construction, a hefty dome-shaped cathedral with gigantic pillars and walls. The arches were so steep, and presiding the edges were various figures from the long-forgotten history.

A single step inside overwhelmed the mind. The space, the dim lighting, and the shades of hues from the windows were majestic, and a sense of peace and comfort wrapped around the heart. Tharis's life-scale status presided over the alter, '-she's popular.'

"Lord Staxius, may I speak freely?"

"Go ahead."

"You see, my lord, my lady can be pushy at times. She's the representation of justice and law... her title was bestowed for the neutrality she has in front of others – it's a doubled-edge curse for she's never

allowed to be biased. And that, the thought of forced abdication wounds my heart. I wish nothing more than for her to seek happiness. You're the famed Adjudicator, the one who presides over the faith of existence, the number one enemy of the heavenly realm. Think of it as a warning from a concerned party. There will be harsh trials ahead. My lord, are you certain you've rejected thy humanity?"

"..."

"I mean no offense. You're powerful, very much so. Power without purpose is nothing more than a sword without a wielder. Your strength, as presumptuous as it sounds, can only be used to the fullest by someone else. Please allow lady Tharis to be your wielder, my lord. She has ideals but not the means to enact her will. Legend speaks of our goddess as a beacon of light, a guide who shall lead the world into a new age. I dare say your fates are intertwined. Such is a simple truth – as harbingers of judgment, you must work as one."

"Sugarcoating the deeper hassle is a great move and all, I'll have to reserve my judgment. I asked Tharis for a week to deliberate her offer. As for her to come to Draebala in a week's time, I will answer then. For now, I'd like to take my leave."

"Where are you headed?"

"Ragno."

"Understood," she clapped, reality split – waves of energy attached to the portal's edge and swayed, "until next time, arch-priestess."

The portal closed. Distant footsteps echoed. "-What did he say?"

"He will think about it," she responded, "-are you sure you want him as your sword, lady Tharis? I thought you were allied to your little brother, Artanos."

"Don't utter that fool's name in my presence," a burst of energy shook the air, "-he was supposed to be my sword and I, his light. The boy had to go and get lost in the arcane knowledge of the Abyss. The world's no longer a safe place, reality must be cleansed. Such the duty of the Goddess of Judgement."